

## Easter Sunday

Our Gospel begins with the end of Sabbath day rest. Mary Magdalen heads to Jesus' tomb while it is still dark seemingly on a reconnaissance mission. The darkness does not prevent her from seeing that the stone which had been rolled over the entrance had been rolled away. She doesn't seem to look inside the tomb. Perhaps the darkness would have prevented her seeing anything anyway. Next, she runs to Peter and John, referred to as "the other disciple", and tells them that an unnamed "they" (perhaps the authorities?) "have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." The fact that she is using "we" indicates that, as in the other Gospel accounts, a few other women had accompanied Mary or joined her at the tomb. Mary's statement to Peter and John is a logical deduction based on the evidence she has so far.

Peter and John run to the tomb to investigate. John (perhaps because he is younger?) arrives first and sees the burial clothes but no body. Peter arrives next and goes straight into the tomb. From inside Peter is able to see not just the clothes or shroud but also the cloth that had been tied around Jesus' head rolled up to one side. Then, John goes in and sees the arrangement of the cloths and "believes". What it is that John believes is at this point is not stated by him, but it is certainly not yet a full belief in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead since he admits that at this point they did not yet understand what Jesus had been trying to tell them about rising from the dead. It may, however, be the first promptings of resurrection faith. John is trying to make sense of what he knows and what he sees in front of him. If the body had been removed by someone it would not have been unwrapped! The very thought of it is revolting. The cloths seem to still be where they had covered Jesus, as if Jesus' body had passed "through" them. The head cloth however, appears to have been removed and dealt with separately.

The Gospel accounts are encouraging to us at this distance from the events of Easter Day. They picture human beings like ourselves, doing their best to make sense out of such evidence as they have. Their struggles are familiar and reflect our own wrestling as we come to deeper faith in God. We are encouraged to consider the evidence and draw a reasonable conclusion, not to "jump" to conclusions, not to make blind leaps but reasonable deductions we can build our lives on. Faith in the resurrection of Jesus is reasonable but still always requires grace from God to help us to overcome our doubts.

Given how the apostles - and all the believers - behaved following immediately on - their willingness to lay down their lives for the truth of the Cross and

Resurrection - it is likely that their trust in the resurrection was based on solid ground which would include the actual appearances of Jesus to them that are not part of today's Gospel reading. Consider a "before and after": They were a defeated group, hiding out. "The world has won! It is over!" But now, they were ready to tell the whole world about Jesus and to build a new kind of community, based on His love.

Eternal life is not just a heavenly "reward", but a present reality enabling us to love in the here and now. The horizon of our life extends to include our present mortal life and all eternity beyond. The reality of eternal life has empowered Christians from the time we were being thrown to lions in the Coliseum to the Christian martyrs of the present moment in places in today's world. It is the belief that empowered the Christian saints those recognized by the Church and the infinitely greater number whose names are unknown to us. It is the same belief that enables everyday people to give our lives to each other in marriage for life, to bring children into the world and nurture them. It is the same faith that enables others to embrace celibate life for the sake of the Kingdom. Jesus invites us to offer up our lives joyfully - in the context and horizon of the Resurrection.

It seems true for many Christians that belief in Jesus' Resurrection and in eternal life grows and deepens over time rather than something we come to in one big leap. We need to be patient with ourselves and with others in this regard. Coming to faith in the resurrection is a gradual process of weighing the evidence and placing this event in the context of the promises made by Jesus. It also must be considered in light of an entire relationship with God. Jesus invites us to believe based on the "track record" of our prior experience with Him, just like the first disciples, in a life of answered prayer.

This seems to be the process of unfolding faith both in the Cross and Resurrection that John describes which begins with an empty tomb in that early morning hours of Easter. Faith in the Resurrection dawned on them and dawns on us not so much by a violent wrench as by an open mind and heart and by a gentle process of growing confidence in God. As such, it breaks into our darkness like a ray of light. It illumines our moments of despair and hopelessness, our fears for the future, the recognition of our own mortality. It empowers our choice to live our lives in the love of God and of our neighbor. Let us allow this light to shine into our lives and to overcome any remaining doubts. Jesus Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed!